Section 3

Section 3   Understanding TRACS Data Collection and Processing

Introducing the Monthly Activity Transmittal (MAT)

Data from the HUD-50059 and related worksheets is collected in a prescribed format and is sent as a MAT transmission to an automated MAT program which is part of TRACS. Upon MAT validation by the MAT program, the MAT transmission fills the TRACS database with the validated tenant data. It contains all of the data currently captured on the form HUD-50059 and some payment voucher data including terminations, move-ins/move-outs, and transfers.

What is the MAT Program?

The MAT program is a front-end subsystem and pre-processor to TRACS. The MAT accepts data transmitted from the industry sites to HUD Headquarters in an electronic form. It then pre-processes the data to ensure it is in the prescribed TRACS format, and then generates and returns error, discrepancy, and acceptance messages back to industry sites via electronic mail and a modem.

Understanding MAT Edits

The MAT program performs limited edits before it passes the tenant data to the TRACS system for further validation and processing according to the HUD 4350.3 Handbook. If the automated data fails the MAT format editing process, a MAT error file is returned back to the sender for correction. This data which failed the MAT format edits is not passed on to the TRACS system. Industry members are responsible for formatting their automated data to be accepted by the MAT program; refer to the *MAT User's Guide* located at the back of this *Information Packet* for detailed technical information. The industry transmits MAT data to TRACS through an electronic mailbox. Transmission errors (such as transmission not received, received garbled, and so on) are resolved by the participant. These transmission errors are described further in Section 5, Correcting MAT Errors and TRACS Discrepancies, on page 5-1.

The MAT Format Logically "Chunks" Information

Since the MAT consists of extensive information, the data is formatted through various categories or actions. These categories are depicted as MAT record types with very specific formats. Each transmission begins with a mandatory "header" record which identifies specific transmission information, sender data, and a count of how many of the other MAT record types are sent in the transmission. Without this header record, the transmitted data is not linked to any specific sender, date, or time

and is essentially lost. For this reason, the header record is required; its omission is a fatal error and causes TRACS to reject the MAT transmission.

Other MAT records correspond to HUD forms (50059 or 52670) or to some specific certification action, such as a move-out or transfer, currently submitted on the voucher. Finally, two special records are used in the error report which is returned to the sender for correction.

By categorizing the data into these records, errors can be easily linked to a specific transmitted certification/action, thereby aiding the correction process. There is only one header record for each MAT transmission, regardless of how many certifications or types of actions were processed during the month. A single transmission consists of any combination of record types.

Understanding More About MAT Transmissions

As previously stated, tenant data is collected according to TRACS MAT specifications through an electronic mailbox. These specifications are presented in the *MAT User's Guide* which details the required formats—record layouts and field characteristics—for all TRACS data transmitted to and from HUD.

Transmitting the MAT Via *Electronic Mailbox and a Modem*

Industry participants are encouraged to submit certification data to TRACS via electronic mail and a modem. When you do, you will be using the TRACS Telemail automated data transmission process. In this process, industry participants transmit data directly to the main TRACS mailbox via the SprintMail (electronic mail) network. Telemail accesses the mailbox hourly and transmits all certifications received by TRACS to be processed during its nightly batch cycle. MAT errors and/or TRACS discrepancy messages detected during processing are returned the following morning directly to the electronic mailbox of the participant submitting the data.

Data Validation Between the MAT and TRACS

All tenant data which is collected and stored in the TRACS database is processed through the MAT program and passes two levels of validation. The first level identifies MAT errors, file format errors caused by the MAT-specified format not being followed correctly; the second level identifies tenant certification (TRACS) discrepancies, data errors based on eligibility and calculation checks as described in the HUD 4350.3 Handbook.

[See Appendix D: Mat Error Message Texts and Appendix E: TRACS Code Tables (Error Message Texts) in the *MAT User's Guide* for more information.]

As previously described, data must pass the MAT edits before it can be received by TRACS. MAT processing checks for gross formatting errors and rejects files or specific data that are not acceptable for TRACS tenant processing. TRACS processing checks for errors in eligibility and calculation as described in the HUD 4350.3 Handbook.

Understanding TRACS Processing

TRACS processing compares the tenant certification data with eligibility rules for the associated subsidy program as specified in the HUD 4350.3 Handbook. It also cross-references fields to ensure consistency and confirms the completeness of submitted information. Finally it reviews calculations for accuracy.

TRACS Discrepancies

Detected discrepancies are usually due to calculation errors or eligibility errors. Both types of errors are grouped together under the term *household certification discrepancies*. The calculation discrepancies occur when a reported amount does not agree with the TRACS-calculated amount. TRACS produces an error message indicating the problem and provides both the TRACS-calculated amount and the reported amount for the data in question/error. *Eligibility discrepancies* are detected when applying certification rules for a specific subsidy program. TRACS produces a discrepancy message indicating the detected problem. Some discrepancies may not be errors but are generated to alert TRACS users of possible problems that should be investigated further.

Communicating Results from TRACS to the Sender

After TRACS processing, the resulting error, discrepancy, or acceptance messages are communicated directly to the sender's electronic mailbox. When industry has questions about the generated discrepancy, the TRACS Hotline is authorized to respond only to recurring tenant certification errors (for example, the income was out of range for the program selected). Programmatic discrepancies concerning HUD policy must be referred to the field office.

Resubmissions

Resubmissions with corrected data follow the same procedure as the original submission. Discrepancy data is stored in the TRACS database with the certification data, and the record is flagged as containing errors. When the sender resubmits the record with corrections, the old information remains as historical data and the new information is loaded into the database and becomes the current and active data.